[Translation]

Simplification of Income Tax Laws

*54. SHRI SATYA DEO SINGH:

SHRI ANAND RATNA MAURYA:

Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Government propose to simplify and rationalise the income tax related laws;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the time by which a final decision is likely to be taken in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE (SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM): (a) and (b) Yes Sir. The Government had set up an Expert Group in August, 1996 with a view to simplifying and rationalising the Income-tax Act, 1961 and to rewrite a new Direct Tax Law. The Group submitted its report to the Government in February, 1997 and a draft Bill based on the recommendations of the Group is under preparation.

(c) The new Bill is likely to be introduced in the Parliament in the Winter Session later this year.

[English]

Indo-Bangladesh Bilateral Trade

*55. DR. ARUN KUMAR SARMA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) the areas in which the Indo-Bangladesh trade has been established so far;

(b) whether the Government propose to expand Indo-Bangladesh bilateral trade;

(c) if so, the details of the plan drawn up and the bilateral trade expanded in the coming years;

(d) whether the Government have entered into any agreement with the Government of Bangladesh for opening of the Chittagong port for transit of Indian goods;

(e) if so, the details thereof and the time by which the port is likely to be opened for Indian goods; and

(f) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (DR. BOLLA BULLI RAMAIAH): (a) to (f) India-Bangladesh bilateral trade is conducted under the provisions of Trade Agreement between the two countries. The major items currently being exported from India to Bangladesh include Cotton yarn, fabrics and made-ups, transport equipment, machinery & instruments, rice (other than Basmati), primary & semi finished iron & steel, ores & minerals, rubber products, electronic goods, drugs, pharmaceuticals and fine chemicals. The major items imported from Bangladesh include fertilizers (manufactured), raw jute, inorganic chemicals and leather.

Government have taken several steps to improve trade with Bangladesh. The India-Bangladesh Trade Agreement provides Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status to each other. Under the SAARC Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA) Agreement, India has so far provided tariff concessions on 572 tariff lines to Bangladesh, which includes automobile batteries, cosmetic & toiletries, dyes, paints & varnishes, tableware, kitchenware etc. and received tariff concessions in respect of 209 tariff lines from Bangladesh for products like coconut oil, pepper, oil cake, leather, tools etc. Removal of quantitative limits on a large number of products under SAPTA Agreement and the proposed setting up of a Free Trade Area in the SAARC region by 2001 AD will further serve to expand Indo-Bangladesh bilateral trade.

The question of transit facilities through Bangladesh has been raised on many occassions with the Government of Bangladesh. At present, India has transit facilities only through inland waterways in accordance with a Protocol on Inland Water Transit & Trade. Government of Bangladesh have so far not agreed to further facilities including use of Chittagong Port for transit of Indian goods.

[Translation]

Pilferage of coal

*56. SHRI VISHVESHWAR BHAGAT: Will the Minister of COAL be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Coal India Limited suffers a loss of crores of rupees each year due to pilferage of coal from various coal mines;

(b) whether 12 to 13 thousand regular mine workers are not being utilised for mining work in various mines instead the mining work is being carried out on the contract basis for the benefit of vested interests in connivance with coal mafia;

(c) if so, whether the Government propose to order C.B.I. to probe into the role of labour organisations, patronage of politicians the nexus between the Coal India officers and Coal mafia;

(d) if so, the time by which the C.B.I. probe is likely to be ordered; and

(e) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COAL (SHRIMATI KANTI SINGH) : (a) It is not possible to know the details of pilferage of coal taking place as such operations are clandestine. However, as per the raids carried out by security personnel, as well as through joint raids with state law and order authorities, the value of coal recovered is around Rs. 1 Crore each year;

(b) No, Sir. Contractors' workmen are not being engaged keeping company's regular workmen idle.

(c) to (e) Do not arise.